

# BECOMING WORLD CLASS

Franz Buck, the head chef at The Cloister\* on Sea Island, Georgia, runs a world-class business. There may be better restaurants in the world, but there are few places that provide a full American plan to so many at such good quality and service:

- They prepare three meals a day for 500 to 600 guests
- The meals are served within a short period of time for each meal, with multiple choices for each course
- The menu changes daily

The following is a synopsis of an interview with Mr. Buck and a tour of the kitchen.

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## PAY ATTENTION TO DETAILS

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To pay attention to details, you have to completely understand the business and be an expert at what you do. The very first thing that Mr. Buck showed us was the dishwasher and silver utensil washer. This, he stated, was a reason many restaurants go out of business. It costs \$160,000 a year in soap alone. If you don't understand these facts of business, you can quickly lose it. If you don't use the right washing process and soap, you can ruin the silverware that is very expensive.

You have to know the "way" of making bread and pastry. The outcome depends on the ingredients, which vary, and the environment. The amount of moisture in the flour and the humidity has a significant bearing on the quality of the bread.

It takes years to become a chef at an establishment like The Cloister and even longer to be a head chef like Mr. Buck. In an apprentice program that The Cloister has, apprentices spend ten years or more learning with experienced chefs. Learning enough to be able to pay attention to details requires experience and guidance.

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## QUALITY ABOVE ALL

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Quality is the first issue for The Cloister. It is the first criteria in the selection of raw goods, followed by availability and price. "Yes, we want to make a profit," explained Mr. Buck, "but we figure that if we focus on quality, the profit will follow."

Quality is related to attention to details. If you are an expert at something, and thus able to recognize and pay attention to the details, and you have the vision of a quality result, quality will be the way of life.

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### **TRAINING, TRAINING, TRAINING**

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Mr. Buck believes in training. And, he backs that belief up by implementing a rigorous, mandatory training program. All the members of the staff continuously go through training in techniques, operating procedures, and concepts. The kitchen is very chaotic during meal preparations. It is essential, Mr. Buck believes, that success and quality will only result if everyone is well trained and knows how to handle many situations.

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### **LOOSELY-COUPLED TEAMWORK**

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The waiter or waitress is the key interface to the customer. It is her/his responsibility to determine what the customer wants and then go back into the kitchen to place the order. It is his/her job to put the order together in a timely fashion and present it to the customer in a pleasing manner. If anything gets out of sync in this chain, there is inefficiency and the potential for customer dissatisfaction.

In the kitchen, there are numerous stations where cooks prepare their specialties for that meal. The flow must be smooth, and the food prepared in unison or some of the food may not be so delightful. If, for example, the waiter or waitress makes a mistake in taking or placing an order which is not caught until the food is delivered to the customer, the special request to fix the problem will upset the flow of other orders synchronized with other customer requirements.

There are many different types of teams. It has always bothered us to hear someone tout teamwork without specifying what type of teams. A golf team and a basketball team are both teams but that's about where the similarity ends. In this type of team, there is clearly a team advance person, and there are strong linkages, but little mutual interdependence.

A close companion of teamwork in this context is discipline. Everyone must do his part. And, if you're not there, or if you miss a beat, you affect others. Mr. Buck used an example from the day. One of the people was late to work by 15 minutes; he was sent home for two days without pay.

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### **EFFICIENCY OF IMPLEMENTATION**

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Efficiency is the prime method of managing costs, not the raw material. This, of course, is not possible unless you have expertise and can pay attention to details -- and have teamwork -- among other things.

Mr. Buck talked of two ways that they manage efficiently. In the use of raw materials, quality and availability were two of the key factors in determining what to purchase. But, you must also forecast demand. Just because you put an item on the menu does not guarantee that people will order it. Therefore, it is essential

that you develop good methods of forecasting demands for items and keeping up with the changing lifestyles of the guests. Demography, values, and health-consciousness are but a few of the factors that must be considered.

Now, if you forecast wrong, you have unused raw material that has a time value on it. That is, it spoils. Mr. Buck keeps a list of things that are in inventory that must be used by certain dates. These must be used creatively in order to please the customers and utilize the material you've invested in. "You can be sure that," Mr. Buck stated, "if we have overstocked bananas, we're going to offer banana soup soon."

One of the key attributes of a good chef is lack of waste in the development of recipes and the cooking of the food. When the apprentices go through testing where they have to show their prowess as a chef, efficiency is a key factor. In tests of this sort, they are given the raw material. Then, they must produce a menu that effectively and appetizingly utilizes the foodstuffs. After developing the menu, they must prepare the food. The examiners come to see what they've done. The first thing they check is not how good the food looks or how good it tastes, but they check the garbage can. How much have they wasted?

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### BOUNDED CREATIVITY

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Mr. Buck depicted a curious blend of creativity and productivity. It is important for the chefs to be creative, yet he doesn't want them creating new recipes which you try out on the customers. He felt that it was important to use tried-and-true recipes, yet, at the same time, expected his people to keep their creative edge in their work. He requires them to do some creative work integrated into the normal work, as exercises, or as a special project. This can range from cake decorations to marzipan Easter eggs to ice sculptures.

When we attended the Sunday evening buffet in the main dining hall, we were greeted by a most beautiful ice sculpture. Graceful, curving lines of a woman's face whose arms or wings were raised in an ellipse above her head. The eyes glowed with the reflected and refracted light, whereas other portions of her face did not -- a haunting, yet beautiful image.

Mr. Buck said that they had a few people who could do ice sculptures. We commented on the beauty of the one we had seen. He smiled; pleased, he said that it was his. He said that he had used it several times. After each use, it goes back into the deep freeze.

He stated, "chefs are artists." And, I guess like all artists, you must work within the boundaries of the media you choose. A painter starts with an empty canvas. The edges of the canvas define what can be accomplished. They provide the energy.

So Franz Buck keeps his people vital by expecting them to keep their creative edge, yet discipline themselves in its application.

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## INTEGRITY

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"If you say on the menu that you have a Waldorf salad, then it had better be a Waldorf salad, not something else," he explained. "If you call it a Cloister salad, then it can be anything you want." It is important to deliver what you promise. To violate this is a big mistake.

Want to create a world-class business? Maybe you can borrow some of Franz Buck's ideas:

- Pay attention to details
- Quality above all
- Training, training, training
- Loosely-coupled teamwork
- Efficiency of implementation
- Bounded creativity
- Integrity

It's a good formula for success. But, there is one part missing. It's not something Mr. Buck said, but how he said it. As a matter of fact, everyone we met had it. They were enthusiastic. They liked what they were doing. They were animated, vital. And, they smiled a lot. The pastry chef could hardly contain himself. His mirth crept out of him in all directions. When he laughed, which he did frequently, his face wrinkled up so much his eyes shut.

Franz Buck must have given an interview a hundred times. Yet, there was nothing mechanical about him. He's got a vision, and he's fulfilling that vision. And, he loves it.

Leaders motivate their people. How do they do this? Is it mystique, personality, or charisma? Or, is it a process they use? Have you ever been told as a manager that you need to motivate the people who work for you? How did you do it? Was it successful?

Difficult questions. Motivating someone to change is even more difficult. Yet, leaders have done it throughout history. Our experience tells us that motivating someone to change is not a thing but a process -- a series of small increments, staged, and repeated over a long period of time.

\* The Cloister is one of the few remaining American resorts that still believes in quality and service. Boasting five stars and a beautiful setting on a privately owned island beach, The Cloister provides all the amenities of an old-style resort transported to the modern ages and great food in copious supply.

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